DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 373 333 CS 214 455

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TITLE From Reading to Writing: American Domestic Advice Scrapbooks.
PUB DATE Mar 94
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (45th, Nashville, TN, March 16-19, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Historical Materials (060) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Creative Expression; *Cultural Context; *Didacticism; *Females; Homemaking Skills; Literacy; Periodicals; *Self Expression; *Sex Role; United States History
IDENTIFIERS Historical Background; Nineteenth Century; *Personal Writing; *Scrapbooks; United States; Womens Magazines

ABSTRACT

In the United States of the 19th century, domesticity was the dominant mode by means of which women were urged to think of their experience. Accordingly, domestic advice scrapbooks were favored by many women of the period--scrapbooks which were composed from handwritten fragments and scraps of newspapers and magazines clipped for personal but often indeterminate reasons and glued onto any available bound pages. The processes of selection and arrangement mark these scrapbooks as a form of personal writing that interacts with, rather than insignificantly repeats, ideologies of behavior and experience. Domestic advice scrapbooks represent participation in the tendencies of the dominant culture, but potentially more than passive acceptance of it. Instructed by professionally published manuals about what their daily lives should look like, women were urged to use this socially mediated experience as a means to refine their knowledge of domestic practices. A testimonial from a 1905 "Harper's Bazaar" suggests the significance of advice scrapbooks for literacy studies; namely, the woman must learn, she cannot merely repeat, and the scrapbook assists this process. Examples of scrapbooks in the Winterthur Library encompass a wide range of materials--recipes, historical clippings, poems, advertisements, calling cards, etc. The idiosyncratic shapes of domestic advice scrapbooks invite contemporary browsers to re-imagine how knowledge is transmitted within instructional scenes, and to imagine that literate expression--that is, an engagement with the forces that shape experience--need not appear in essay form and need not be composed in group settings. (NKA)

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From Reading to Writing: American Domestic Advice Scrapbooks

In her description of "The Extracurriculum of Composition," Gere reminds of a common difficulty within revisions of the history of composition. While looking outside academic settings, researchers often focus on writing practices that resemble the composition instruction currently performed in schools and valued by many teachers. In that version of writing, members of workshops and self-help groups write stories, poems, or essays from their own experiences (76); they are, however, "motivated to revise and improve their composition skills," often desire "opportunities for publication of various sorts," and believe "that writing can make a difference in individual and community life" (78).

I call attention today to a form of writing in many ways far removed from this model, a more ephemeral, less privileged site where nineteenth-century women represented and organized their domestic experience. Decidedly non-essay in form, domestic advice scrapbooks were composed by many women, though working alone, from handwritten fragments and scraps of newspaper and magazine clipped for personal but often indeterminant reasons and glued onto any available bound pages. Domestic education and experience needs to be understood, then, as a site through which women might actively negotiate, rather than passively inhabit, the gender roles assigned to them. In domestic scrapbooks, one finds evidence of how, not simply that, an individual reader

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inscribed the instruction into the mysteries of domesticity offered through domestic manuals and women's periodicals.

Deborah A. Smith, Curator of Paper at the Strong Museum in Rochester, New York, argues that making scrapbooks was a nineteenth-century obsession. According to Smith,

> Nineteenth-century scrapbooks survive in great numbers and fall into three major categories: albums devoted to the personal memorabilia of an individual life, albums focusing on a specific collecting interest, and albums that are compilations of many kinds of printed paper ephemera, saved for the novelty of color printing (63).

Domestic advice scrapbooks fall within the boundaries of all three categories, precisely because of the ways that domesticity functioned within American culture at this time. Domesticity was the dominant mode by means of which women were urged to think of their experience; an individual woman's life ought to be above all things a domestic one. Yet domesticity was simultaneously a specialized form of study that numerous domestic manuals and periodicals instructed women to devote themselves to. Further, beauty in color, design, and arrangement was one tenet of domesticity's general principles for producing comfortable homes.

As one type among several, domestic advice scrapbooks easily look like compilations of previously circulated, patriarchally authorized material, the mere collection of bits and pieces of ideological fragments from the scrap heap of

American middle-class culture. Yet the processes of selection and arrangement that necessarily compose domestic scrapbooks mark them as a form of personal writing that interacts with, rather than insignificantly repeats, ideologies of behavior and experience. Like Roger Chartier's work on individual customizations of occasionnels and marriage charters or Cathy N. Davidson's analysis of the marginal notes by individual readers in copies of C -lotte Temple, domestic advice scrapbooks represent participation in the tendencies of the dominant culture, but potentially more than passive acceptance of it.

The counsel to produce scrapbooks of domestic advice appeared in numerous domestic manuals and women's periodicals. These texts occupy a peculiar place as materials instructing women about domesticity. On the one hand, they detail the daily, often mechanical, operations of producing and maintaining a home. Cooking, cleaning, and caring for children is one version of "women's experience." On the other hand, the presence of domestic advice presumes a need for women to be instructed into a specified realm of knowledge. That which appears as natural, unmediated, even organic--a woman making her home--is actually a means of organizing women's experience within certain specifiable and teachable parameters.

In other words, housewives are made rather than born, even in the nineteenth-century. The daily experience that is the presumed normative one for women has to be inculcated through books specifically intended for instructional purposes. Domestic

scrapbooks are one way that women acted as students of domesticity. The production of scrapbooks suggests, however, that while women were willing to study to be domestic, they negotiated the received versions of the ideology. Surviving scrapbooks suggest the idiosyncratic and personal responses women gave to domesticity as they re-made it into their own experience.

Domestic manuals published both early and late in the nineteenth-century encouraged women to make scrapbooks of domestic advice. Instructed by professionally published manuals about what their daily lives ought to look like, women were urged to use this socially mediated experience as a means both to refine their knowledge of domestic practices and to produce their own domestic manuals. Their individual work was presumed to generate a knowledge better than any that they might merely read in a book. For example, the 1806 The Young Woman's Companion and Instructor advises women to

> lay in a some store of [domestic] knowledge [. . .] by observing what passes before you--by consulting prudent and experienced mistresses of families--and by entering in a book a memorandum of every new piece of intelligence you acquire (272).

Years later, the 1888 House-keepers and Home-makers marks the relationship between domestic manuals and a woman's experience in this way: "At best the book is but a series of hints and suggestions, out of which I hope the young house-mother may build a better system for herself" (v-vi). By keeping diaries and

scrapbooks of any anecdotes, information, and observations that might be of future use, a housewife becomes a student of domesticity. Her scrapbook is the sign of her particularized knowledge, rather than a simple repetition of circulated ideas. (See hand-out. Pages 8-9 of Lydia Maria Child's The Frugal Housewife [1831] look like a scrapbook.)

Numerous women's periodicals, including the Harper's Bazar, encouraged women to use their advice columns as a resource for producing domestic scrapbooks. Though nineteenth-century periodicals had not yet invented the pull-out supplement, the Bazar's departmentalization of domestic advice lends itself easily to the production of scrapbooks. Toward the end of the last century, the Bazar tended to group all domestic advice concerning recipes, household decorating, party planning, and sewing on discrete pages without other information. Making use of isolated parts of the Bazar within personal scrapbooks would then be simplified; a reader need only cut out the menus or decorating advice, without bothering about other unrelated materials. The periodical instructs women in various ways how and why to make their own scrapbooks, how to represent and organize their daily experience. Further, by giving the stories of readers who have made such books, the periodical reinforces and perhaps replicates the continuation of this activity among other readers.

A testimonial published in May 1905 suggests the significance of advice scrapbooks for literacy studies. Here the

writer represents the Bazar as a model for acquiring a certain set of behaviors, rather than as a reflection of the experience she might be presumed to have. The woman must learn; she cannot merely repeat, and the scrapbook assists this process:

> It is such a comfort to have someone who knows who will settle these perplexities for me. My means are limited, but I feel all the more that I'd like to know how to deserve all the little niceties that cost nothing. I have a scrap-book of clippings from the BAZAR. I have only begun to entertain during the last year, and have found your help invaluable.

This reader has followed the instructions of domestic manuals and of the Bazar by producing a scrapbook. Both as an enactment of acquiring knowledge and the evidence that she has acquired it, the scrapbook is simultaneously the repository of knowledge and the activity by which to produce knowledge for herself. Further, the Bazar is a model for rather than a reflection of the reader; she apparently seeks to do, to behave, as the Bazar shows her to. She is the novice who needs assistance from the source of knowledge. And, the predominance of the language of "value"--"means," "cost," "deserve," "invaluable"--suggests the social value that this kind of knowledge indeed has.

The evidence in the Bazar of women producing advice scrapbooks escalates in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, as do the individual variations described. A passage in "With the Corresponding Editor" of the December 1907 number, details "a collection of all the articles on handiwork that

appear in the BAZAR." During 1908, a regular column called "The Housemother's Problems" functioned as a compilation of domestic advice from readers who identified themselves as experienced "housemothers" as well as supplied examples of several specific types of scrapbooks: "A Card Index at Home," an archive of both clippings and hand-written advice affixed to cards which fit snugly into a shoe-box, arranged by category (August 1908); clippings for self-improvement that could be held in a pocket-book and read during periods of waiting in shops (September 1908); and a "growth book" as a gift for children which shows stages of childhood in chronological order (November 1908).

Producing a scrapbook is another piece of domestic advice among many; the making of scrapbooks remains a specifically domestic activity any housewife ought to engage in. At the same time, supplying readers with examples of possible scrapbooks enabled women to imagine producing their own, guided by their specific needs and interests. The increasing frequency of these scrapbooks hints at the extent to which readers were appropriating this practice as the Bazar offered models for learning how to produce them.

Examples of scrapbooks in the Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera in the Winterthur Library suggest both the range of materials that fall into a domestic category and the indeterminacy of the productions. Recipes for food dominate the scrapbooks catalogued as "Cookbooks," yet they typically include housekeeping tips and remedies for illness.

Often, the scrapbook will be part collection, part account book, part personal memoranda. Mary Perkins's "Recipe book, c. 1870-1890," for instance, organizes food and household preparations, as well as personal letters and the list of bed linens "brought from home when I went to housekeeping." Another example, the anonymous "Scrapbook, c. 1836-1890," was composed by gluing into a catalog of the Meriden Britannia Co. newspaper clippings as various as advice on manners, poetry, and a chronology of the Mexican American and Civil Wars. An account book is loosely contained inside.

A close look at one example suggests the improbability that scrapbooks represent a passive acceptance of domesticity. Compiled mostly of handwritten and clipped recipes for food, Elnora Blanchard's "Cookbook, c. 1870-1890" also includes clippings about historical figures and poems, as well as an advertisement for Everett's Raisin Seeder. While it might seem simple to determine the use of the saved recipes, the clippings about historical figures and of poems fill a more personal space that researchers may never recover. And was the advertisement saved for the product that it advertised--a reminder to buy Everett's Raisin Seeder--or because it was a likable example of color printing--as Deborah A. Smith might suggest--or because Elnora Blanchard liked the design? Mrs. Blanchard followed one directive of domesticity by making a scrapbook, but the significance and use of this kind of production could not be

contained by the suggestion to make it. Though inscribed by a social discourse, it remains a personal production.

The indeterminacy of domestic scrapbooks is most obvious when saved materials never made it as far as book form. Though not organized in any discernible fashion, eight bits of scrap scattered throughout a copy of the 1885 Gunn's New and Improved Hand-Book of Domestic Medicine serve as evidence that women saved domestic materials that had a special use for or importance to them (see hand-out). Again, clipped recipes and advice about turkey influenza seem to have obvious uses. But "For June Brides," a biblical Lesson Picture Card, a red and black inked nameplate for something or some people known as "Arbuckle Bros," and the calling card of "Nannie R. Mc Adoo" are more difficult to determine. Is Nannie R. Mc Adoo the owner of the book or an acquaintance? Or was the card saved because someone liked the floral design or planned to make some use of it? And was the query about turkey influenza the saved thing, or the picture of the girl on its reverse?

Women's personal lives as organized by domestic experience have been significantly devalued in the twentieth-century, especially by some versions of feminism and feminist literary criticism. When homemaking is positioned as the opposite of women's suffrage, it becomes a simple matter to view the domestic as ordinary, natural, and normative experience. In such a scenario, only women constructed as "exceptional" managed to move

beyond their culture toward imagining different social formulations.

Yet it is also because domesticity appears so pervasive within American culture that it has not been possible to categorize the domestic very easily. Domesticity exceeds all sorts of boundaries. It organizes the lives of men as well as women; it defines the limits and the politics of nation; it haunts the pages of high literature and of instructional manuals. A great unmanageable, it has been easier to castigate domesticity as a limit upon women than to confront the excessive effects it has had upon our culture.

While teachers of composition have typically rewarded those students who follow our leads, who do the kind of writing we instruct, we have not been so generous with the women who followed cultural instructions and embraced domesticity. Domestic scrapbooks seem to reinforce the image that many women embraced domesticity, but they also show how individuals complicated and transformed received ideology into particularized lived experience. The idiosyncractic shapes of domestic advice scrapbooks invite us to re-imagine how knowledge is transmitted within instructional scenes; they enable us to imagine that literate expression--that is, an engagement with the forces that shape experience--need not appear in essay form and need not be composed in groups settings.

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